

Hypothetical situation  
the gym example  
philosophy essay



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The hypothetical situation which is being considered here is based around a public institution like a University and it relates to decision making vis-vis distribution of resources. There are 2 levels in this scenario. The first is that the university has to buy gym equipment's for making two gyms in the university. These are the boy's gym and the girl's gym which are in their respective separate hostels. The question before the university is regarding how the fund which it has should be divided in relation to making the respective gyms. It has to be kept in mind that the university is a public institution. There is no inadequacy of funds with the university and the question relates to division of that fund.

Now, let us suppose that the university built the same gyms by bringing in the same equipment's in both the gyms. Thus, the fund which was divided was also divided equally for the two gyms. Now, another year has passed and the university has to do modifications to the gym by bringing new equipment's. It is in the knowledge of the university that there is a difference of usage of the boys and girls gym with the boy's gym being used more than the girl's gym, if the usage has to be seen in relative terms. Then, the university decides to bring new equipment's for the boy's gym and in its decision puts some of the equipment which was earlier in the boy's gym into the girl's gym.

The research paper for the first scenario tries to look into what would be a position of equality and would that position be a just one. In the second scenario, the attempt is to see whether the decision of the university is against the principle of equality and whether the decision is a just one. The focus of the discussion would be to search for the principle question which

arises and to answer that question to answer the other problems which are involved.

## **First Scenario**

As explained above, in this first scenario the university is bringing equipments for the first time and the primary question before it is whether either of the gyms should be made better than the other one? The concern of the university is regarding the gender stereotype of women. The stereotype which becomes predominant in sports and physical activities.

The above concern over the stereotype for the university needs to be understood here. There are inhibitive notions regarding physical appearance of women, their athletic ability, and participation in sports. They have been traditionally considered as the 'weaker' sex- physically, mentally and emotionally.[1] There is another aspect of femininity which relates to what is feminine in nature i. e. appearance and behaviour and because of this women are moved away from physical activities like doing weights, sweating, being aggressive, etc.[2] Moreover, women who get over this femininity are subjected to negative stigma.

The above understanding regarding the perception of women in sporting and physical activities leads to two arguments in favour of a better boys gym. These arguments are firstly need or usage based and second argument is regarding the capability. These arguments can be related but from a perspective of looking at the arrangement in which there is a better boy's gym, they would be dealt with separately. The first argument here is that the girls do not 'need' the gym as much as the boys do. It is based on the

assertion that the usage of a boy's gym would be much more compared to a girl's gym. This is based on the number of people who would use the gym. Hence, more funding should go towards the boys' gym.

The second argument here in favour of a better boy's gym is that girls do not need the vast array of equipment's required in a boy's gym because of certain biological and physiological differences between the two sexes. These aspects are the difference in size, muscles, fat, bones, flexibility, response to heat stress, etc.[3] These factors directly affect the capability of women in using a range of equipment and thus these factors restrict the need for certain equipment in the girl's gym. The above two arguments are the primary arguments made against two equal gyms.

These arguments regarding a better boy's game raise a prima facie argument against equality and it becomes pertinent to look into whether the fundamental principle of equality is being affected in the present case. Equality is a wide and highly contested concept. There are various notions of the same and it has to be decided as to whether a particular notion of equality is applicable here in the present case. Equality here would refer towards a qualitative relation within the correspondence which is being made. There are more questions raised regarding equality, like equality of what, why equality, why not a particular form of equality but since the focus here is on distribution of resources by the university, the right questions would be addressing this distribution by this public institution.

The objective of university in providing access to the facility of gym would help in resolving the dilemma of what equality has to be considered here.

The university is addressing the lifestyle needs of the people. Hence, the university cannot directly make people fitter, stronger, etc. What it can do is provide opportunity to the people. Hence, the arguments regarding providing a better men's gym have to be seen from a perspective of providing equality of opportunity.

This concept of equality in terms of opportunity needs more explanation here. This concept has been discussed by various thinkers dealing with distributive justice. This is a part of one of the two principles of justice in Rawls Theory of Justice.[4]According to Rawls, the way to think about justice is to do by asking what decisions one would choose in an original position behind a veil of ignorance.[5]Rawls argues that in such a position people would not take decision which favour utilitarianism but will make decision which would tend to remove social and economic disabilities. An essential part of this process of removing disability would involve providing equality of opportunity. Rawls also allows social and economic disadvantages through his ' difference principle' but goes on to say that infringements upon fair equality of opportunity cannot be allowed on the basis of his difference principle.[6]

There is also a moral argument behind this conception of justice by Rawls and it is that distribution of income and opportunities should not be based on factors that are arbitrary from moral point of view.[7]This argument relates to the two conceptions of formal and substantial equality of opportunity. ' Formal' equality of opportunity deals with discrimination and that there should be no discrimination on grounds like gender, sex, race, ethnicity, etc.

[8]This conception clearly relates to Rawls conception as within this, if one is <https://assignbuster.com/hypothetical-situation-the-gym-example-philosophy-essay/>

looking through the veil of ignorance in an original position then the grounds above are 'arbitrary'. There is another conception of equality of opportunity and this requires compensatory and other institutional measures to remove the inherent attitudes of people which would not go by just addressing the discrimination.[9]It is referred as fair equality of opportunity.

It now becomes important to judge the earlier contentions which were raised in favour of a better boy's gym. These were based on two arguments of capability and usage. They have to be considered on the touchstone of equality of opportunity. The basis of both these was in a way traced to the gender stereotype which was explained earlier. However, the basic conception with formal equality of opportunity was non-discrimination on any basis including gender; hence such a distinction cannot be made.

Analysing from Rawls perspective of justice, the criteria to determine whether there is equality or not is that whether the distinction vis-a-vis the opportunity is 'morally arbitrary'. To further understand this criteria, any person in a veil of ignorance in the original position. is an initial position and he has no knowledge about his or her place in the society, his strength or weaknesses, his values or ends.[10]They are morally on the same level if they are equal. Hence, if the distinction is being based on capability then they are morally not on the same level and hence the distinction becomes arbitrary. The purpose of going to the original position is to remove the arbitrariness of the world and this brings in fairness.

It has to be also realised that equality of opportunity goes beyond formal equality into the domain of fair equality of opportunity. Fair equality of

opportunity becomes relevant in this case of discrimination as the purpose of fair equality is to address the 'moral arbitrariness' i. e. social and economic disadvantage which is not removed by just addressing the discrimination. If equal fund is granted to the girl's and boy's gym, then it would lead to a shift in the stereotype regarding girls, even though the shift might take time. Hence, fair equality of opportunity would be addressed in this way.

It might however be argued that what forms equality of opportunity requires discrimination and mere differentiation does not amount to discrimination. This is further substantiated by the fact that the usage of the gym equipment's would be sufficient for the needs of the girl's in isolation. In such a case, there can be no discrimination because no one is unfairly being prevented from addressing her need.

The above argument, however in the context of equality of opportunity is untenable, because such judgement regarding usage and capability cannot be made without at first providing opportunity to everyone. Any such judgement continues to reflect the stereotype against women in physical activities. Thus, the equality of opportunity is not achieved the moment the girls are not provided with an opportunity to have an equal gym.